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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1305
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2422
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9444
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7699
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3860
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 0005
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2709
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0529
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0151
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7239
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000115

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CE](#) [ECON](#) [ECPS](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TINT](#)

SUBJECT: PRESS REPORTS LINK CYBER CENSORSHIP TO WORLD BANK
PROJECT

Classified By: DCM Valerie C. Fowler for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (SBU) The lead news story in the February 14 Sunday Times newspaper claimed that information technology experts from China's Military Intelligence Division were coming to Sri Lanka to help the Government of Sri Lanka block websites critical of the government. The article indirectly cited a senior official in the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) and said that these consultants would assist the TRC in setting up a new regulatory framework for Sri Lanka which took into account the latest in internet social network sites, SMS communication and internet media. Among the possible regulatory changes under consideration by the TRC, according to the article, was legislation making registration compulsory for all websites, and possible controls on search engines such as Google. The World Bank is funding a program to assist the TRC in implementing regulatory reforms in Sri Lanka's information and communication technology sector, through its Institutional Development Fund (IDF).

12. (SBU) The World Bank issued a statement on February 15 that: its grant agreement had no provision to utilize the funds for an internet censorship program; a consultant had not yet been hired; the consultant would have to be approved by the World Bank; and the World Bank would not approve of any program that involved internet censorship. Claus Astrup, an economist with the World Bank in Colombo, added privately that no money had been disbursed for the project, and offered to facilitate Embassy contact with the project manager for the project.

13. (C) Comment. If true, the GSL attempt to import Chinese help to block critical websites continues a disturbing trend of media control. As the GSL has increased its pressure on traditional newspapers and other media, the internet media has become an increasingly important source of information, particularly during the election and its aftermath. There is concern, however, that the government has been increasing its own involvement in these new media sectors at the same time. The disappearance of Lanka-E-News journalist Prageeth Eknaligoda several days prior to the January 26 presidential elections remains unsolved. There are reports that an unknown number of Sri Lankans have been arrested since the election, on vague charges of posting anti-government messages to sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The GSL has blocked several internet sites in the past, such as Tamilnet, and appears to have blocked several web sites on election day. Newly appointed TRC Director

General Anusha Palpita, who also serves as director of the Government Information Department, reportedly told the Sunday Times that he felt there should be a 'proper system of monitoring and regulating content' on the internet. His definition of content which should be regulated appeared to be quite broad, including political, cultural, religious, or pornographic, that might 'create problems in society.' He denied that any Chinese engineers were assisting the TRC. Post will continue to monitor this issue, and its possible impact on both press freedom and on the business community. End Comment.
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